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Jonathan Fahey and Michael Maiello

8/12/2002 @ 12:01AM

# 5,000 Miles--Or Bust



Courtesy Subaru

Two weeks before the start of the semi-annual Alcan 5000—a nearly 5,000-mile road rally that begins Aug. 14 outside Seattle, then stretches up to the tail of Alaska, cuts through the forbidding Canadian Yukon and finally ends eight days later outside of Calgary, Alberta—we were naive enough to think we could actually win the thing.

We'd been promising friends that we'd bring the Alcan trophy back to the Forbes offices, maybe even for display in the Forbes Museum.

Then we thought it might be a good idea to figure out what, exactly, it was we had entered.

That's when it hit home. We weren't going to win.

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1974. We asked him what we had to do to win.

“Don’t worry about that,” he said, cracking up on the other end of the line.

“You’re not going to come close.”

Ha! Did he know he was talking to two people who have had their driver’s licenses for a combined 28 years?

“The guys you’re competing against have been rallying for 30 years,”

Schneider replied dryly. We still had no idea why experience would matter so much, until Schneider spelled out the way the Alcan works.

You see, a road rally is not a race—it’s not about who goes fastest over a stretch of road, and dirt and gravel and snow, all of which we should expect to encounter. Instead, it’s who makes it from one checkpoint to the next closest to an allotted amount of time. And the point system works like it does in golf: The lowest score wins. For example, if you’re supposed to arrive at point B at 5:00:00, and you arrive at 5:00:00, you get zero points, and you’re king of that leg.

Arrive at 5:00:01, you get one point for being one second late, and you’re pretty good. If you arrive at 4:59:59, you get one point for being one second early, and you’re pretty good, if a tiny bit antsy. If you’re human, and you come in at 5:01:00 or 4:59:00, you get 60 points.

So how tough would the competition be then? After all, maybe everyone is a minute or two late or early? And then just because the Alcan rally will include 100 or so checkpoints over the course of nine days, the winner could have a score of 6,000 or so, right?

Not exactly.

R. Dale Kraushaar R. Dale Kraushaar, 59, a former Marine who ran his first rally in 1962 while stationed at Camp Pendelton, and who now makes his home in Fountain Hills, Ariz., won the last Alcan rally with a score of 72.4. In other words, Kraushaar averaged less than a *second’s* deviation per checkpoint. And just to rub it in, that Alcan rally was held in the winter and went all the way to the Arctic Circle at Prudoe Bay, where the standing temperature was minus 40 degrees Fahrenheit.

OK, so we weren’t going to win, but that hasn’t deterred us. And we don’t see any reason it should deter you, either. After all, there are dozens of rallies of this sort (held for regular Janes and Joes like you and us) worldwide, and how are you going to get good at this sort of thing if you don’t try?

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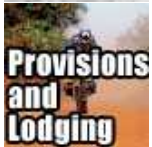
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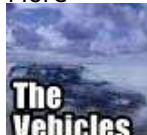
Good question. Turns out, not that much—and quite a lot. But to get more granular, have a click or two below. And be sure to follow our dispatches on Forbes.com’s Lifestyle section starting Tuesday, Aug. 20. And who knows, we *could* somehow win, right?

Well, maybe we could take second.

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The Grind



Courtesy Volvo

The reason we chose to enter the Alcan 5000 in the first place is that you don’t have to be a professional driver or have an elaborate support crew, like you would in the mold of the storied Paris-to-Dakar rally. At Alcan, at least in the summer, there’s some hope for the everyman driver who doesn’t wear the colors of a big-budget automaker.

“It’s an adventure,” says rally founder and organizer Jerry Hines Jerry Hines . “It’s a return to the kind of rallying done at the turn of the century. The



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in the 1970s, where they would drive for a day or two for a day, then get back on the road.

aight, then socialize

Still, the day-in, day-out grind of eight to 14 hours behind the wheel or in the navigator's seat won't be easy, even though we won't be competing in the toughest division, where you'll find Class I drivers like Kraushaar. Racers in his section hook up a computer to their odometers that measures distance to the 1,000ths of a mile and a fancy clock that measures time to the 1,000ths of a second. The computer constantly recalculates exactly how fast the driver should go to make it to the final checkpoint within the allotted time. A good rally computer can cost between \$500 and \$3,000.

By the way, there are separate classes for vintage cars, motorcycles, SUVs and even casual "tourers"—those in the last category don't even want to keep score.

We're entering the SOP class, which stands for "seat-of-the-pants." We're allowed only a calculator and a good watch. That's the way we like it, seat of our pants.

As for the actual competition, there are about 100 checkpoints, like we already said. Once or twice a day, the 16 auto teams and the eight motorcycle entrants in our class will compete in "time-speed-distance" events, where we will have to make it from point A to point B in a certain amount of time, while traveling past checkpoints at predetermined speeds.



The Vehicles





Kraushaar is lucky, he's sponsored by Subaru , but even so this isn't a fully professional rally. At Alcan you do have to be your own mechanic (see [Mechanical Support](#)), and you can't depend on either a team or a professional "wrench" to help you out. Meaning, even if you do have a vehicle sponsor, you still have to drive and keep your machine running.

As for the cars themselves, all of them--no matter the class--have to be street legal. That's the only restriction. That might mean you'd want special tires and undercarriage protection, as well as some timing or engine modifications, but naturally that depends on your section. For us, what matters is that we're not made of gold. We're driving a sturdy and dependable Volvo XC 70 wagon, which had stoneguards added and off-road tires mounted, and are trying to prove against all reason that anyone can win, er, finish this rally in a car he doesn't mind having dinged by flying rocks or soaked in mud.



**Provisions And Lodging**



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Courtesy BMW

The good part of rallying on most of this continent is that you often get to stay in inns with real beds. For the Alcan that might vary from the proverbial “bed-over-a-bar” in Hyder, Alaska, to the downright plush Yellowknife Inn, in Yellowknife, Canada, but the point is that nowhere will we be pitching a tent and building a fire after a hard day of driving.

As for provisions, we will be packing a fair amount of food. Since Schneider’s advice was to “Never, ever pass a gas station; always be full, because there are long stretches with no stations,” we figure, if nothing else, we can rate the quality of beef jerky as we travel north. As for predators—no, not other drivers, but grizzlies and such—we thought about pepper spray but were afraid we might accidentally (or on purpose) wind up using it against each other.

Of course, if it were you at the helm, dear reader, you might want to pack large quantities of Red Bull, Gatorade, Vivarin, special clothing, insect repellent and perhaps a pistol or two, but come on, how sporting would that be?



**Mechanical Support**





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winning as do sponsored teams, because Hines put limits on the amount of equipment and support each team can have (no onboard fuel cans, only six forward-facing lights, etc.). Also, the rally doesn't go through any large towns, where teams could make repairs and adjustments on the fly.

We're carrying a full-size spare, a fire extinguisher, road flares and a two-way radio with which all entrants will be equipped. We also know where all the Volvo dealerships are along the route (that'd be precisely two), and as a backup, we have a list of the locations of the nearest Ford dealerships as well. A major problem might keep us out of medal contention, but then so might our driving acumen. In any case, the former is an issue that might plague any competitor in any similarly formatted rally. Let's just skip the latter issue, shall we?



**The Participants**



As you might anticipate, these kinds of competitions attract obsessive-compulsives of every age and national origin. Personality disorders aside (why are we doing this again?), some notable participants include Walt



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Alex Millar and Shona Williams Shona Williams of R Deer, Alberta, who are driving an original Mini Cooper S; and two former national rally champions, R. Dale Kraushaar R. Dale Kraushaar and Gary Webb Gary Webb of Mohave Valley, Ariz.

We won't even get into who would want to drive a motorcycle for ten hours a day for 5,000 miles.



**Other Rallies**



Courtesy Hero

Before signing up for a 5,000-mile trek through the wilderness, you might want to find a shorter, more local rally through civilized terrain by checking out the Web site for the Sports Car Club of America ([www.scca.org](http://www.scca.org)), which lists a lot of national events. We decided, in pursuit of "seat-of-the-pants" authenticity, to test our mettle at Alcan ([www.alcan5000.com](http://www.alcan5000.com)).

But rallies are staged worldwide and, in fact, can be a way to see a country in a fashion you'd never expect and to rub shoulders with people from all over, both other contestants and locals.





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as vintage racing and rally cars. The journey travels 10,000 miles, beginning in Edinburgh, winding through Argyle, the Southern Highlands and Oban as well as the Isle of Skye.

The same organization, Historic Endurance Rally Organization, or HERO (www.hero.org.uk), sponsors an Arctic Rally; a Portugal Rally; an amazing, 20,000-mile, London-to-Sydney rally in 2004; and one from Germany to Egypt next year, called Trial to the Nile.

Like we said, this is a great way to see the world. Just don't be more than a second late, OK?



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